

Why Was Christ Baptized?

SHOULD WE FOLLOW HIM IN BAPTISM?

By CORNELIUS R. STAM

Look within or about you and you will see enough failure and sin to break your heart.

The Evangelist Luke paints a very disappointing picture of man before he presents Christ, the perfect Man.

The angel brings goods news to Zacharias and he will not believe it. A host of angels acclaim the Savior's birth, but He is hardly recognized. His own mother travels a whole day's journey before she realizes that He is not in the company. And then this neglectful mother rebukes *Him* for tarrying at Jerusalem! John the Baptist tries in vain to bring the people of Israel to repentance. They are given the Law and they break it. They are offered repentance and they refuse it. Yes, they are offered repentance—

"But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by John for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done; Added yet this above all, that HE SHUT UP JOHN IN PRISON."
(Lu. 3:19,20).

An immoral wretch occupies the throne while the great reformer is shut up in jail!

This is the picture that Luke paints of man before he introduces "the Man Christ Jesus."

After painting this picture Luke takes us back again into the ministry of John the Baptist. Among the throng who have come to be baptized we find "Jesus also." (Luke 3:21).

OUR LORD'S BAPTISM

"Jesus also!" Striking phrase!

John's baptism was clearly a CONFESSION OF SIN. It was "THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE." (Luke 3:3). Sinners came to John *"and were baptized of him in Jordan, CONFESSING THEIR SINS."* (Matt. 3:6).

But what is this?

"THEN COMETH JESUS FROM GALILEE TO JORDAN UNTO JOHN, TO BE BAPTIZED OF HIM." (Matt. 3:13).

Why should *He* be baptized? He had no need to repent. He had no sins to confess. The Jews had expected Messiah to *baptize*, not to *be baptized*. They had said to John, *"Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ . . . ?"* (John 1:25).

Even John was surprised and greatly embarrassed at our Lord's coming to be baptized.

"BUT JOHN FORBAD HIM, SAYING, I HAVE NEED TO BE BAPTIZED OF THEE, AND COMEST THOU TO ME?" (Matt. 3:14).

And the Father Himself broke through the heavens to let all know that

"THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED." (Matt. 3:17).

But notice how our Lord answered John. Notice it, all who ask why Christ was baptized:

"AND JESUS ANSWERING SAID UNTO HIM, SUFFER IT TO BE SO NOW: FOR THUS IT BECOMETH US TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Matt. 3:15).

This does not, of course, mean that his baptism with water alone would fulfil all righteousness, but simply that this was one of the things necessary to the fulfilling of all righteousness.

Since our Lord had no sins to confess there can only be one reason why He submitted to "the baptism of repentance." He was taking the place of others. To "fulfil all righteousness," to settle the account between God and man, He must be "numbered with the transgressors" and bear the blame and disgrace for their sins.

What thoughts must have filled the minds of the people as they saw Him come with others to be baptized by John! How they must have said to each other, "You see, He is not so holy as some people seem to think! Here He comes, just like the rest! John's words have been troubling His conscience!"

A GREATER BAPTISM

But our Lord's water baptism was only a shadow of the real thing. After this was over He said,

"BUT I HAVE A BAPTISM TO BE BAPTIZED WITH, AND HOW AM I STRAITENED TILL IT BE ACCOMPLISHED!" (Luke 12:50).

He spoke, of course, of His baptism of fire and blood and death on the cross.

See Him as He stands before Pilate:

"AS A SHEEP BEFORE HER SHEARERS IS DUMB, SO HE OPENETH NOT HIS MOUTH." (Isa. 53:7).

"And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, HEAREST THOU NOT HOW MANY THINGS THEY WITNESS AGAINST THEE?

"AND HE ANSWERED HIM TO NEVER A WORD, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." (Matt. 27:12-14).

But *why* did He not answer? He was not guilty of all those crimes. He could have given a thousand answers and exposed the secret sins of His accusers at the same time.

Ah, He was willingly bearing the blame for *their* sins—and for yours and mine. Standing there, speechless and condemned in our stead He carried His purpose through.

He had identified Himself with man to save him. He was numbered with the transgressors in the *confession* of sin; now He was to be numbered with them in the payment of its *penalty*, dying on a cross between two thieves, to "*put away sin by sacrifice of Himself.*"

This was the great baptism which wrung from His lips such expressions as, "*How am I straitened until it be accomplished!*" "*Now is my soul troubled.*" "*Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" This was

the baptism which made Him "*exceedingly sorrowful*," and caused Him to "*sweat, as it were, great drops of blood.*"

The death of the cross! It was the culmination of what He had begun when first "numbered with the transgressors." *This* baptism was, of course, even more important than the other to the fulfilling of all righteousness. *There* He had *confessed* sin (taking the blame for others); *here* He was to *pay* for sin—"the sins of the whole world!"

Let us ever thank God that our blessed Lord became "OBEDIENT, UNTO DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS," for "BY THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE SHALL MANY BE MADE RIGHTEOUS." (Phil. 2:8, Rom. 5:19).

THE GREATEST BAPTISM

Some years after the crucifixion Paul said,
"I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST . . . WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME." (Gal. 2:20).

After Saul had been baptized with water as a repentant Jew, the glorified Lord showed him the higher truth that by grace, through faith, Christ's death had been reckoned as *his*—indeed, that it *was his death* that Christ had died. This is why we find Paul exclaiming that he is "*crucified with Christ*"—"baptized into *His death.*"

Water baptism was only a shadow. Christ was the Substance. And Paul was the chosen

vessel to reveal the glorious truth that believers are "*complete in Him . . . buried with Him in baptism.*" (Col. 2:10,12). And this became the very theme of Paul's message. Henceforth it must be known that there is but "ONE BAPTISM," (Eph. 4:5),—baptism into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3), and so into Christ Himself (Gal. 3:27) and into His body. (I Cor. 12:13).

Why, then, was Christ baptized?

"To FULFIL all righteousness." "To fulfil—ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Matt. 3:15).

Did He FULFIL—ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS? Indeed He did. This was fully manifested "in due time."

Then what are men doing when they go through the ordinance of water baptism today?

They are casting reflections upon His finished work!

Fundamentalists rightly oppose Modernists for teaching men to follow the earthly Jesus; yet thousands of Fundamentalists turn right around and ask us to follow Him in baptism!

Rom. 6:3 and Gal. 3:27 both teach that *believers are "baptized into Christ."* Some Fundamentalist teachers, to uphold their water baptism theories, say that "into" should have been translated "unto" in these passages. Can you see that this helps to prove their case? *Does water baptism bring us into ANY relationship to Christ, either "into" or "unto?"*

One Fundamentalist preacher says, "The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was baptized in water. Remember that." But he might just as truly have said, "The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was circumcised. Remember that!" Should we therefore be circumcised? If we submitted to that ordinance today we would most certainly deserve the stern rebuke which Paul pronounced upon the Galatian believers. But Paul tells us distinctly, by the Holy Spirit, that believers have been both circumcised *and* baptized WITH CHRIST. (Read carefully Col. 2:10-12).

FOLLOWING CHRIST

The apostle Paul instructs us how we should follow Christ today, but this is the lesson so many refuse to learn.

He says, "BE YE FOLLOWERS OF ME, EVEN AS I ALSO AM OF CHRIST." (I Cor. 11:1).

He, unlike the twelve, got his message, not from the earthly Jesus, but from the glorified Lord in heaven.

In II Cor. 5:16 he marks a new number in the program of God:

"WHEREFORE HENCEFORTH KNOW WE NO MAN AFTER THE FLESH: YEA, THOUGH WE HAVE KNOWN CHRIST AFTER THE FLESH, YET NOW HENCEFORTH KNOW WE HIM NO MORE."

Christ on earth took His place *with* sinners, yea, even the place of sinners. He fulfilled all God's righteousness for failing, sinful man, and

God righteously raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. The full accomplishments of His finished work were made known in due time through Paul, the chief of sinners saved by grace.

Now we know Christ, not as the Man of Galilee, but as the risen, exalted Son of God, through Whom and in Whom we may obtain a perfect standing before God.

"FOR GOD HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, WHO KNEW NO SIN, THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM." (II Cor. 5:21).

When our blessed Lord came up out of the water "there came a voice from heaven, saying, **THOU ART MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.**" (Mark 1:11).

The question now is, *do you stand before God in Christ?* If so, then, most assuredly, God is well pleased with you and you are **"ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED ONE."** (Eph. 1:6).

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